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# Dreaming a Radical Citizenship: How Undocumented Queers in the United States Configure Sites of Belonging and *Being* through Art and Media Technologies

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# Dreaming a Radical Citizenship: How Undocumented Queers in the United States Configure Sites of Belonging and *Being* through Art and Media Technologies

Ximena Keogh Serrano

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Identities are mapped in real and imaginary,  
material and metaphorical spaces.

Phillips 45

- <sup>1</sup> In 2010, the repeal of the DREAM Act<sup>1</sup> would become the igniting moment through which a previously veiled constellation of intersectional identities would begin to gain visibility in the public sphere. Self-identified queers or members of the LGBT community traversed with an undocumented legal status would begin to map themselves onto alternative geographies of existence, thereby challenging the nation-state's exclusionary discourses on citizenship, race, gender, and sexuality. By means of active protest, art, and involvement in media technologies, members of the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) would lead and organize what we now know as the Undocuqueer Movement, a movement that since its incipience has significantly strengthened in number, organizational support and social outreach.

<sup>2</sup>

The personal narratives of the self-proclaimed Undocuqueer youth, intricate and multi-faceted in their form, all share a common experience of oppression and civic exclusion. Just as their point of origin, connection to their assumed "homeland," cultural modes of attachment, language(s) spoken, sexual embodiment, practices, and affective experience in the United States vary extensively, a shared thread of preoccupation, stigma, and marked status have led them to question the structures that govern U.S

society and the legal frames that shape their realities. Such questioning can be seen as one of the principle forces that have activated the Undocuqueers to bear light to their social positioning via the modes of mapping I will explore ahead. The desire to engage in real and symbolic modes of “coming out” points to a resistance to a State discourse that insists in privileging and legitimizing particular identities, thereby negating those which fail to conform to hegemonic models of citizenship.

3

In this article, I aim to look at the Undocuqueer practices of social visibility and activism, and examine the ways in which these art representations (be in the physical form or online circulation) provide a space of *being* for these individuals, a sort of queer-oriented inclusive locus that moves away from our assumed conception of geographic belongings. My use of the term “queer” stands as a way of naming political identities and theoretical postulations that aim to disrupt normative systems of living and frameworks of belonging. To posit in more succinct terms, I follow Jack Halberstam’s articulation of “queer” as “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (6).

4

Among the questions I set out to explore are: how are these individuals inscribing their identities in social spheres? What rhetorical tools are they using to exhibit their messages? What are their limitations? How are they contesting regulatory discourses and negotiating their desires, considering their embodied struggles and lived realities? How do they participate in coalitional efforts for change? How do they engage dialectically with their onlookers and fellow Undocuqueers? What are the effects produced by their layered forms of activism and visibility? Can we conceive of their practices as what I propose to be the dream-work of a “radical citizenship”?

5

In order to interrogate the ways in which the Undocuqueer’s active engagements produce alternative forms of belonging, my project first sets out to identify the rhetoric of the State with regards to citizen formation. Here, I am interested in seeing how models of “citizenship” are conceived, promulgated, and internalized. To do so, I look at political trajectories of laws and their social implications with regards to acceptance or refusal of queer and/or migrant bodies. I also look at various markers that have limited or prevented particular individuals from gaining access to lawful documentation. By assessing the language and practices enacted by the State to carry out a rhetoric of migrant refusal and desired subject affiliation, we are able to see the ways official and nonofficial (but discursively practiced) policies inform the lived experiences of racialized and alternatively marked Others in the U.S.

6

My work then sets out to explore the alternative discourses proposed by the Undocuqueer activists. I begin by tracing the first activist pronouncements made by queer-identified migrants in the United States, to then outline the various coalitional efforts enacted by Undocuqueer groups and projects. I also survey the figurations of “History” produced by the state, side by side to the Undocuqueers’ reflections of Past(s) never imprinted on the archive. These particular forms of art production work to create new dialogues about “world-making,” more importantly working toward the production and dissemination of subjugated and silent knowledge(s) and pasts. The theoretical framework that guides my reading of these political acts of engagement is linked to a

practice of decolonial thinking. To engage in decolonial thinking entails a conscious movement away from what Walter Dignolo has called “the matrix of coloniality,” which names the imposition of univocal ways of “knowing, doing, and being” (3). Secondly, I use a “queering” methodology (as proposed by the work of theorists Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Sedgwick) which similarly works to undo the hegemonic and heteronormative models of existence that regulate human bodies and subjecthoods. To “queer” thus entails a process of re-framing, and re-imagining the world, away from the heteropatriarchal regime.

7

Until now, the publications reporting on the Undocuqueer movement have come mainly from researchers in the fields of social and political science (see Beltrán; K. Chávez; Seif; White; Zimmerman). The studies produced have generated valuable findings and readings of Undocuqueer individuals and the principles that guide the movement and continue to inspire participatory engagement. Nevertheless, there has been little study of the ways in which the narratological inscriptions (web-based, artistic, and so on) create intricate assessments of self, propose alternative epistemologies, and creatively disengage from systemic models of oppression. This article aims to fill that need by focusing primarily on the content exhibited in the different mediums, and locating its transformative power. Furthermore, I am interested in seeing the affective possibilities produced by the movement, and examining the ways in which their messages discursively build communities of affiliation.

## 1. Crafting Citizenship

8

Before setting off to examine the Undocuqueer’s modes of self “outing” and “mapping” onto the social sphere, we must first look into the notion of citizenship. To engage in the politics of citizen formation, it is important to look at the ways in which citizenship has been crafted historically, for its chains of signification have always been dependent upon changing conceptions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and health. With time we have come to see the re-crafting of citizenship extend beyond its privileged few (white, male, and property owners), and make way to include women, people of color, LGBT, HIV/AIDS positive folk—all of whom at some point in time were constitutionally negated citizenship status. (K. Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics* 1-2) Nevertheless, the phantasmagoric effects of such negations seep through our current social and political realities. They manifest themselves through the porosity of language and through social practices of policing that make evident the State’s continued obsession with the making and securing of boundaries. Such boundaries can be seen in respect to multiple forms of identity embodiment that include race, gender, sex, language, and national origin. Discriminatory laws make way into the U.S constitution as a means of “safeguarding” the State, and what is understood to be its foundational “being,” i.e. it’s core. It becomes no surprise then, how:

Citizenship in the United States has never been easily achieved for racialized groups. This reflects the racial frame of the United States wherein whites are understood to be the base category, the ‘most American’ in terms of their civilization, culture, language, and work habits, while individuals of other ethnoracial groups are considered inferior (e.g. the stereotype of Mexicans as lazy,

dirty criminals) and thus are not necessarily deserving of US citizenship. (M. Chávez, Monforti, and Michelson 4)

- 9 The “Nation” under its etymological foundation, meaning “to be born,” becomes configured as Anne McClintock reminds us “through the iconography of familial and domestic space... [For] we speak of nations as ‘motherlands’ or ‘fatherlands’” (357).

10

The project of nation formation is thus infused with a rhetoric of “purity” and “authenticity” of kinship, it creates an idea of family bonds and bloodlines in order to congeal an illusion of “wholeness.” In the context of the United States, as Lauren Berlant has outlined in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, the creation of personal and collective identities linked to a geographical terrain presuppose a link to some kind of “national fantasy,” one which is secured through performative acts of transmission, desire, and the circulation of ideas that remain consistent with articulated formulations of collectivity enacted by the State (24). Whiteness in the U.S came to occupy such space of “wholeness” and origin, becoming the marker of neutrality (Berlant 24). The maintenance of such allusion would from here on need to be maintained through a series of performative acts that would guarantee a reproduction of heterosexual and monoracial pairings. For the sake of the State, and as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warren’s 1998 article, “Sex in Public,” posits:

National heterosexuality is the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behavior, a space of pure citizenship. A familial model of society displaces the recognition of structural racism and other systematic inequalities. This is not entirely new: the familial form has function as a mediator and metaphor of national existence since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. (313)

- 11 The migrant, by mere act of crossing state-defined boundaries, immediately assumes the identity of “impure,” “undesirable” subject. Her/his insertion is understood as a threat to the security of the body politic. S/he is, as Kristeva would put it, the abject: “that which haunts the edges of the social subject” (McClintock 71). To add the intersection of “queer” to this migrant identity further destabilizes the State’s heterosexual platform, which works to guarantee the fulfillment of future “blood lines” under its teleology of reproduction.

12

By coming out of the “closet” as gay and coming out as an undocumented person, the Undocuqueers are performing acts of resistance to the State’s imposition of unnatural boundaries that take shape in the form of territorial containment, regulation of human bodies, sexualities, race, and culture. In this sense, they are enacting what Foucault names “politics of refusal” (216). Their language proposes a tactical dissidence to social impositions, seeking instead an alternative to State validation, what as we will see ahead can be seen as a new logic for belonging.

## 2. On the Horizons Made Possible by Art and Media Technologies

13

Through a multiplicity of illustrations, YouTube presence, and narrative displays, the web has become the space through which the Undocuqueer have been able

to mobilize their social presence and engage politically with others beyond their immediate locales.

14

As extensive research on the radical potentiality of cyberspace has shown, “virtual culture” has a utopian promise in that collectivities can gain force through virtual links that do not require physical presence (Robbins 153). Online communities can be built upon shared threads of commonalities, and individuals can seek spaces for bonding, affective expression, and can furthermore seek modes of relief to varied conditions of precarity. The topics that remain taboo in F2F (face to face) social settings are able to find an otherwise unknown space via web circuits that can afford certain levels of self-regulated anonymity.

15

Among the portals through which Undocuqueers create such communities, is the website “Dreamersadrift.com,” which was founded by self-named “Artist” Julio Salgado. In it we find a number of different videos pertaining to the experience of variously diverse DREAMers. The messages are wide-ranging, presenting: short skits that mockingly gesture to the contradictions inherent within the U.S political system and social structures, heart-felt monologues about deep frustrations and fears experienced by Undocuqueers, witty dialogues, tactful denunciations of state policies, calls for action on community members beyond the Undocuqueer audience, music videos with re-created lyrics of known pop songs, videos artfully displaying difficult concepts like “The Legalities of Being.” The value of self-recognition is of tremendous importance here, for it disavows the idea that one is alone. To see the imprint of one’s struggle reflected on a screen, video, or public mural has the ability to confer such individual with a unique understanding of self and furthermore opens a space for continual dialogue on the politics of identity construction.

16

In the realm of art, there is also a serious claim to be made in regards to its ability to imagine life otherwise, in its making room of alternative spaces to which belong. Artistic creations might then be a space that open up an invitation, a navigation of existence outside the confines we assume in material spaces. Here, I contend, lies the power of transformation, for it systematically creates a space of dwelling—one which is not attached to fixity, but rather engages in acts of renewal and re-formation.

17

By inserting themselves onto these alternative spheres, they are building affective communities that make visible the daily struggles that characterize their lives. Experiences like isolation, fear, threat of detention and/or separation, and inability to receive basic human needs like healthcare, are but a few that make up their embodied realities. However, unlike previous generations of undocumented individuals, queers, and other lawfully excluded communities, the Internet has widened the spheres of connectivity within marginalized individuals, and has henceforth allowed for a meeting space of recognition to occur. The sense of alienation so pervasive amongst those whose identities could not be marked publicly, found new identifications in the cyber sphere, ones that could be recognized, understood, and to some extent, even protected. The forms of sociability and belonging afforded by the internet, however, cannot avoid the deep modes of exclusion and marginalization that occur in real-life encounters and experiences. Here, I am pointing to markers of identity that inevitably coat each social

interaction—be it in the form of race, gender, sexuality, self-presentation, accent, among others. All these are delimited in opposition to whatever has been categorized as neutral, i.e. the white male heterosexual body. Such categorization is a result of epistemological privilege. Imperial powers have made it so that the agents of knowledge production (white occidental men) secure a standard of neutrality in their quest for systemically and scientifically organizing the world (see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*). By claiming “objectivity,” these “purveyors of knowledge” have failed to mark their point of enunciation. They in turn become a standard ground through which all individuals view themselves. These judgments inextricably become cemented in all systems of social and political life, producing notions of who is “at-home” and who is “out-of-place.” It is hence no surprise that people of color are often disqualified from the marker of state belonging, as a result of the assumed neutrality of the white body. The signifiers of the body and the way in which it relates in social spaces in the world is one Sara Ahmed interrogates in *Strange Encounters*. Here, she surveys how bodies enter into circuits of the “knowable” and by extension, mark that which is deemed “strange” and “outside” the realm of hegemonic knowledge (55). Racialized bodies are often deemed to be “out of place,” dispelling particular forms of discomfort to white social spaces (39). Karma R. Chávez also presents these modes of articulated discomfort in her article “Embodied Translation: Dominant Discourse and Communication with Migrant Bodies-as-Text.” In it, she sets out to survey the metaphorical inscriptions posed specifically upon Latino bodies. Chávez’s piece provides a compelling view into the ways in which bodies transit as texts, the ways in which they are read and configured, and thus rendered and circulate in the public imaginary. In the case of Latinos, the notion of “illegality” garners force in relation to the way in which brown Latino bodies are read by the US population. As Maria Chávez, Monforti, and Michelson take note in *Living the Dream*, “All Latinos—whether legal immigrants, undocumented, or US-born—are regarded with suspicion in the United States. A recent poll found that one out of three Americans inaccurately believes that most Latinos are undocumented” (5). These individuals take on precarious conditions when their sense of belonging and statehood is constantly questioned. The psychic toll taken on as a result of such continual exclusion create particular conditions for these individuals, opening up a space to enact modes of resistance to floating signifiers. Thus, the need to valorize their existence in mediums outside of hegemonic social spheres. The internet thus opens a space for such activity to occur.

18

As Angela Jones has posited in *Queer Utopias*, the emergence of “cyberspace” has opened grounds for what she calls “queer heterotopias.” Following Foucault’s theorizations of “heterotopic spaces,”<sup>2</sup> Jones contends that “queer heterotopias” are “spaces where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime” and engage in “a radical politics of subversion” (2). Jones’ contention here proves particularly useful when looking at the modes of activism put forth by a particular set of Undocuqueers: those who do not wish to ascribe to normalizing values in order to achieve a path to lawful citizenship. Thus, this kind of activism does not take on the “politics of respectability” enacted by certain groups, where a platform of normativity is strategically set in motion to gain acceptance. Rather, these forms of activism and art all stem from a desire to break with the State’s illusions of purity and governability, and work instead to dismount ideals and propose alternative visions of queerness and belonging.



### 3. Language and Mappings of Self onto Cartographies of Resistance

19

Foregrounding the importance of language selection in all processes of meaning-making, my inclusion of the term “citizenship” in the title of this piece is strategic. It is oriented by a desire to re-imagine this linguistic sign, one which necessarily relies on the ideological platform of “queering.” Given the “double discourse” inherent within the rhetoric of “citizenship,” that as Karma Chávez importantly points out “simultaneously mobilizes people and acts of resistance and erases some of those same people, dissident actions, and colonial pasts and presents” (13), I am interested in confronting the manifestations of the colonial past in the present.

20

In the Undocuqueers’ strategies of visibilization, we find significant critiques to the regulatory discourses that have produced the notion of “natural citizen,” of “pure” and “desireable” identity/(ies). There is a clear understanding of the epistemological violence produced by colonialist discourses. As Undocuqueer activist Alán Peláez López asserts: “I am in these positions because of a complex colonial history that has enslaved people that look like me” thereby noting the racialized histories constituent of nationalist discourses (Tumblr). As declarations like this one make evident, (the seemingly imposed task of) embracing historical oblivion becomes an impossible feat for the differently Othered subject, for their bodies are sites of exposed vulnerability. Understanding the naturalization of white and heterosexually-abiding bodies as neutral markers of belonging automatically positions anything outside such spheres as potential threats, as perpetual “beings away from home” (Ahmed). Such rhetoric of exclusion is fed by a commitment to historical amnesia. With this, I am speaking of groups’ attachment to seeing particular moments in time as imagined “beginnings,” those that, as Benedict Anderson long ago pointed to, belong to the category of authoritarian simulacrum, a mere imagination of unity as pronouncement for such. Said gestures work to safeguard particular forms of comfort at the expense of epochal erasures.

21

Imbued with historical consciousness, the Undocuqueer activists call upon feminist discourses that have spoken to their histories of injury and exclusion and have provided them with theoretical models through which to better deconstruct their interlocking oppressions. Among these are Gloria Anzaldúa’s theories on Border Thinking (as the Neplanta state), of existing *in-between* and mestiza consciousness, and her poetic incursions into the affective landscapes that constitute the dwelling in that very space. In artistic productions like those of Chicana artist of California, Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, specifically through her piece named “Detail of Undocumented Borderland Flowers,” an aesthetic materialization of Anzaldúa’s words come to focus. We encounter a vivid portrayal of the exposed place in which the ‘outsider’ dwells, as Anzaldúa records: “This is her home / this thin edge of / barbwire” (35).

22

The raw, steal-image, and injurious implications that encircle the signifier “barbwire,” make visible the “un-homeliness” of this purposefully ironic naming of “home.” It is a sight of precariousness. “Home” becomes a dwelling in ambivalence, a



space injected with the threat of annihilation. Colonialist practices are the foundation upon which such “home” is built, for they have elaborated hierarchical identities that artificially legitimate discourses of superiority / inferiority.

23

Life chances diminish for individuals who are categorically marked as inferior and/or pathological. Their notion of self is further damaged when they are treated and perceived as threats to the body politic. The historical demonization of queers and migrants have left indelible imprints upon these communities. Their inability to align to the models of identity understood as “pure” and “proper” in the State code of behavior has engendered serious forms of internalized oppression and un-acceptance of self by those who carry these identities. As Imelda, a young Undocuqueer woman declares: “I was taught to hate myself but I have consciously struggled to love me” (Salgado, Tumblr). In this statement, the need to dispel heteropatriarchal regimes, is made visible. The education of “self-hate” Imelda speaks of in this case can refer to the ways in which individuals like her (woman, migrant, and of color) are consistently erased from circuits of knowledge, i.e. through lack of representation in the media, educational systems, and objects of knowledge production. Such education of “self-hate” can also be seen as stemming from the transmission of particular state and social discourses—ones where alternatively marked others (migrant, queer, gender non-conforming, etc.) are read as perpetrators of violence and thus always assumed as a threat to the body politic. I see the colonial and imperial wounds carried by individuals like Imelda, as igniting forces that have shown to champion queer and decolonial frames of thinking.

24

The messages inscribed in the widely circulated posters and online images engage in such practice as they propose affiliative models of community coalition. Personal websites, Tumblr, YouTube, and Facebook have made such transcriptions possible. Julio Salgado’s personal website alone presents hundreds of art posters, video clips, and political manifestos that promote critical engagements with U.S politics ([juliosalgadoart.com](http://juliosalgadoart.com)). A rise in YouTube channels and podcast shows that relate directly with the unique struggles of Undocuqueers has also worked to garner a sense of inclusion and belonging for these otherwise silent communities. Their modes of expression display a language that builds on a revolutionary framework for understanding love and humanity, as it advocates for a “Freedom to live and love” (Tumblr). They expose the arbitrary impositions of borders, as an inheritance of colonial and imperialist practices. As Cameroon-born Undocuqueer, Ngowo Nuemeh, aptly points: “As an indigenous person, I understand that borders weren’t present prior to colonization. And when borders were imposed on us, we internalized that” (Amara.org). A desire to constitute their humanness is at the core of the messages being circulated. In the language exposed we can trace the embodied sorrow and psychic effects assumed by these individuals, as they have had to confront an ongoing State discourse that insists on negating their being. It is that very humanity that they attempt to claim back through these modes of visibility.

25

If we briefly look at the signifiers used to refer to undocumented individuals, chains of semantic violence emerge. Words such as “illegal,” “unauthorized” and “alien,” activate powerful acts of exclusion, and can perform serious harm upon those whom they seek to refer. From here, existences are deprived of physical and psychic dwellings, necessary for the flourishing of human beings. Furthermore, a vision of “un-belonging” is

quickly assumed and internalized. The repercussions of these linguistic enactments can be acutely observed in the counter-discourse produced by the Undocuqueers. One speaker discusses how “Our survival depends [on the Undocuqueer coalition]” which illuminates upon the possibility of a real and/or symbolic death, if the material communities wherein they live cannot recognize their humanity.

26

Our history with words, and their modes of affective materialization become important sites of interrogation for the Undocuqueer activists. In their messages we see an attempt to deconstruct the imperialist and heteronormative values absorbed in everyday language and modeled by society. Questions of what it means to be “illegal” permeate the speech of the online Undocuqueer communities and activists. Activist Yasmin Nair’s personal website lives among many discursive platforms that empirically present tactics of exclusion for undocumented migrants (yasminnair.net). By outlining the historical currents that have propelled the use of violent language to refer to immigrants (in various situations—documented or not), she is calling on her viewers to engage critically with state legislation and its material effects. She is furthermore performing a kind of alternative education, wherein we see an inclusion of voices that otherwise remain outside the scope of circulated public knowledge. Creative and argumentative writings like that of Nair’s work side by side with video critiques and short web series in opening up alternative forums of information and propose new conceptions and understandings of political identities and their making. Articulated in this sphere we find Soultree’s “Hum-Undocumented” YouTube video (from *Dreamer’s Adrift* YouTube channel), which battles against dictums of the state and its psychological toll. Through a melodious evocation, we hear the poet voice the grief of being denied “humanness” by not possessing the documentation that would provide her with such status. The music plays with the question of “Hum-Undocumented” as in “undocumented human” and makes note of the terms used for those who do not possess documents formalizing their status of belonging to the State: “illegal” and “alien.” Again, the notion of “illegal alien” signals to a fearful foreignness. The video works to produce an emotional fatigue over the onlooker through these symbolic expositions. Its closing scene shows a picture of a woman with a heart bleeding through her purple shirt, thereby moving the audience to understand the ways in which undocumented subjects are seen as outside of the frames of humanity.

27

Viewed as a whole, these video productions present a confrontation to the imperial practices that have crafted lines of territorial division in order to advance political and economic gain, and furthermore to secure and protect white patriarchal hegemony. The particular ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and class work to inform models of belonging within the State apparatus, are artistically and discursively explored by the Undocuqueer activists. The art pieces disrupt the cultural imaginary that insists in reproducing normative and intelligible subjects. The strategies employed to advocate for certain rights and for the possibility to simply “exist” in this territorial domain, are founded on the belonging to communities of struggle and on shared experiences of oppression.

28

Among the other video productions of the *Dreamers Adrift* collective, we find videos which incorporate the making of an artistic piece alongside a narrative voice

depicting the flows of ink on the paper. The videos present Julio Salgado's work in action, as he moves through a large white paper canvas, materializing the content speech in the background. Through a lyric modality, the drawings and poetic expression intend to highlight questions of acceptance and structures of being, questions of how identities have been constructed through history and outside of it.

29

By proclaiming their existence in the various media technologies, they are becoming active participants in their subject formation, thus resisting the State interpellation of "non-citizen." Their art becomes a medium through which they assume agency and power through self-expression, or rather self-insertion into the public sphere. As one Undocuqueer activist, Rommy Torrico proposes: "I create [art] to resist.... To affirm my existence, harness my own power and make it known that I will not be erased or silenced" (undocumenting.com). Torrico's drawings in particular, powerfully locate the structures of pain gnawing at the body of the invisibilized subject.

30

Following Jack Halberstam's vision of "queerness" as exemplifying "alternative methods of alliance" (1), I understand the Undocuqueer activists as agents who are crafting new models of real and imaginary dwellings. They are re-signifying the concept of "family" by reframing the ways in which such entities can exist, and by extension, be understood. Among their proclamations is the insistence that they are a "Familia de corazón," which asserts a framework of belonging outside of the rhetoric of family "blood lines" instituted by the State. By uniting under an alternative structure of kinship, this "Familia de corazón" challenges the assumed legitimacy of the traditional family model. These acts of refusal effectively contest Modernity's logics and impositions on subject formation and serve as regenerative topoi upon which individuals can move and embody what Chandra Talpade Mohanty deems "Temporalities of struggle," which point to "[a] process, [a] reterritorialization through struggle, that allows... a paradoxical continuity of self, mapping and transforming [one's] political location" (122).

31

When we think of maps, we think about materially real, geographical places. To think of maps necessarily involves a passage to ways of understanding the world, ways of conceiving geographical terrain and politically championed spatial delineations. The map, as Anne McClintock fittingly asserts "is a technology of knowledge that professes to capture the truth about a place in pure, scientific form, operating under the guise of scientific exactitude and promising to retrieve and reproduce nature exactly as it is" (27).

32

When I speak of the alternative geographies being generated by the Undocuqueer activists, I speak about a new way of configuring material realms of identity and belonging. If, following David Harvey, we conceive of "Material space, for us humans, ... [as a] space of experience" (279), we understand the need for their abstract representation. "These spaces of representation are part and parcel of the way we live in the world" (279). Therefore, the visual and written representations of self through art, media technologies, and social interfaces, can be seen as politically driven and tactically imagined spaces of inclusion. These spaces operate in a sort of virtual world that embodies lived experience and possesses a utopian dimension of possibility. The act of looking thus "can be conceived as the affective relation between a body and an image. Looking is the materialization of the image" (Coleman 158). To represent oneself and

operate within the represented serves a significant purpose here, for it defies the regulatory regimes that define membership and belonging—working instead toward a differential “imagined community,” to borrow from Benedict Anderson (1992).

## 4. On Dreaming a Radical Citizenship

33

I speak of “dreaming a radical citizenship” because I look at the ways in which the activists within the Undocuqueer community build notions of “citizenship” that subvert the logics of “authentic belongings.” Metaphorically speaking, these ideological and spatial explorations have the ability to emulate the timelessness and imprecision of dreams. To inhabit the space of “dreaming” denotes an engagement with alternative realities, ones which might be deemed “unreal” given the internalized structures of living that inform our social imaginaries. However, it might be said that our daily/nightly dream voyages are a practice necessary for the organization of our life experiences.

34

Following another semantic line, the conscious act of “dreaming” in real (awake) time operates under an imagined horizon of futurity. In this case, to dream necessarily involves a stepping outside of the present and envisioning a space of possibility, one that I argue can be seen in the artistic and media displays of the Undocuqueer activists. As Theodore Adorno has laid in his theories of the aesthetic, art as a practice engages in an act of reparation of what does not yet-exist. It performs a language outside of society’s system of operations. Hence Esteban Muñoz’s vision of art as that which “allow[s] us to see the not yet conscious,” which he perceives as the “utopian feeling” (5). Art as material reality (form) and ideological vessel (content), gives way for a dialectic of potentiality to occur, it enables an access to that “utopian feeling,” for it houses the self (for however briefly) onto that place of being.

35

The notion of ephemerality is an important one here, for it constitutes part of the ideological framework proclaimed within the narratives of the Undocuqueer activists. Just as fixed origins are not constructs longed for by the Undocuqueer community, neither is the quest for longevity. The ephemeral nature constitutive of human life is not perceived as a matter to grieve. The notion of transience here and the little emphasis drawn to it, provide a substantial metaphor through which I propose we understand these communities in coalition. Like the art piece, the web page, the act of civil disobedience, all can be seen as events that do not attempt to claim permanence. In fact, like human bodies, all are subject to transformation and death. Queer identities and queer models of existence all aim to conceive of identities as in constant flux. Meanwhile, a desire to cling to fixity can only serve to reproduce previous models of oppression and demonstrate the grave ills such practices are capable of inflicting.

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To illustrate this conception, the figurative emblem the Undocuqueer movement has chosen to represent themselves, is the butterfly. This symbol serves as a mode to portray the interconnected processes that inform their human experience, as one in transition, guided and adapted by circumstance. The butterfly engages in continual movement, transiting across space and time, ignoring any arbitrary lines of exclusion. By depicting themselves through the image of the butterfly, the Undocuqueers are

contesting the State's strategies of territorial containment and exclusion. They are furthermore engaging in a politics of *detrterritorialization*, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, wherein individuals disperse spatially through territories, to consciously undo and destabilize hierarchies of power and uniform models of identity.

## 5. Conclusion

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As I have attempted to outline throughout this piece, the spaces whereupon the Undocuqueer speak and imprint their identities, operate as an alternative form of citizen formation, one that moves away from occidental practices (under its patriarchal and heteronormative shadows), and opts instead for a queer model of political citizenship. Such model, I contend, emulates the very state of dreams and queer imaginings—in its fluid disposition and temporal fluctuation. The printed poster, painted wall, narrative video, and/or blog thus become inclusive sites of belonging—a sort of borderless home that has the ability to create affiliate ties that radically change the notions of geography/space/identity so imbedded in our social imaginary and political constitution.

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## NOTES

1. The DREAM Act would offer undocumented students (brought to the U.S before the age of 16) with a "conditional legal status" if enrolled in higher education or military service (M. Chávez, Monforti, and Michelson 30).
2. In his 1984 essay, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Michel Foucault delimits the contours of "heterotopic places" as "[p]laces that exist outside of all places," importantly noting how "it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (2).

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## ABSTRACTS

Following the Undocuqueer Movement's practices of social visibility and activism, this article looks at the ways in which their artistic modes of self-inscription (be in the physical form or online circulation) produce alternative queer dwellings, and propose radical modes of belonging.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** borders, liminal subjecthoods, migrant activism, queer migration, social media, undocumented, Undocuqueer, urban art

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